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MARGARET FULLER AND GOETHE, by Frederick Augustus Braun, A. M., Ph.D. New York, Henry Holt and Company, 1910.

It is no unusual thing to find in connection with a doctor's dissertation an announcement to the effect that the study is to be expanded and published as a book. With the dissertations on Goethe this promise has been redeemed in a number of cases, resulting in a valuable contribution to Goethe literature. In other cases, however, the sample has created no demand for the expanded product and the enterprise has been dropped upon the acquisition of the coveted degree.

The book here under consideration, one of the former type, grew out of a doctor's thesis presented to the German Faculty of the University of Illinois, and is not only a valuable addition to the already extensive literature on Goethe's personal and literary relations, but will appeal also to the serious-minded who, while not necessarily interested in the narrower problems of literary influence, may nevertheless desire to know something of the potential significance of Germany's greatest poet. This latter feature of the book is due to the fact that Margaret Fuller understood Goethe and his world mission as no American or English writer before her, and but few since.

In an introductory chapter the author indicates in brief the field he intends to cover, ascribing considerable prominence to Margaret Fuller in the New England circle of literary friends to which Emerson belonged, bringing forward abundant evidence to show that she was not only the inspiring genius of the coterie, but also an unusually gifted critic and very clever writer. From copiously quoted utterances of her immediate friends and acquaintances, all of them well known writers, we gain a favorable impression of her charming personality, and of her rare gifts as a conversationalist, a philosophical thinker, and an appreciator of poetry. As the editor of *The Dial* she became a leader in one of the most promising movements in the history of American letters, which had for its object the creation of a national literature. As she did so much toward the introduction and fostering of German literature in America it was time that some present day scholar call attention to the scope and influence of her efforts in this field.

In the chapter on her early education we learn to know her as a precocious child, subjected to the straight-jacket Puritan

methods of education which over-stimulated her intellect for one of her years, but left her emotional and intuitive powers to starve, so that as a girl she felt herself socially a failure. By the time she had reached the age of twenty-two she was fairly well versed in English, Latin, French, Spanish, and Italian literatures, and knew something of Greek and philosophy—but had grown out of sympathy with Puritan theology. In a letter written in 1830, she portrays her ideal of the “person of genius” of which she conceived her generation to be in great need. Strange as it may seem, her glowing picture shows many striking resemblances to young Goethe as we know him in those last productive years before he left Frankfort to go to Weimar, and even the tone of her language, as well as her longing, suggests a review of his in the *Frankfurter Gelehrte Anzeigen*. It is no wonder then that when shortly afterward she made the acquaintance of this “great apostle of individual culture”, as she styles him, she became his ardent follower.

In her study of German, which she began in 1832, inspired by Carlyle's articles in British magazines, she was for the most part her own teacher, and had read within a year an incredible number of the writings of Goethe, Schiller, Körner, Jean Paul, Tieck, and Novalis. She evidently grasped well what she read and was encouraged in her fruitful occupation by certain Harvard acquaintances who had studied in Germany and, fortunately for her, spoke with the greatest enthusiasm of the German language and literature. A new world soon opened to her and she found in it what her soul had long craved. As her inner being began to expand and grow her desire for more German books seemed insatiable. As was to be expected, her first idol was Schiller, for she found it easy to get into sympathy with him. Goethe, the matchless liberator of the inward life, was much more of a problem for her. He is for every one who strives to attain the highest spiritual growth. The attitude toward him of the student who seriously attempts to understand him is a pretty safe basis upon which to gauge his spiritual stature. Margaret Fuller was at first not “happy in reading him”. But after struggling hard with her inner self and the traditions of her early training she recognized in him, as Emerson says, “the most powerful of all mental reagents,” and “her teacher. . . . nor was there room for any other. . . . She found her moods met, her topics treated, the liberty of thought she loved, the same climate of mind. . . . It was one of those agreeable historical coincidences. . . . the simultaneous appearance of a teacher and of pupils, between whom exists a strict affinity.” And yet her admiration of him did not amount to blind worship, for she

preserved her own intellectual independence, receiving from him the most powerful incentives to develop and exert her own personality as Nature had intended.

In the third and much the longest chapter of his book, Dr. Braun discusses Margaret Fuller's religion and philosophy of life. He shows convincingly the error of classing her among the Transcendentalists, though she was a personal friend of the leaders of that movement. She is more properly called a follower of Goethe, in that she sought the highest perfection of character in the development of the truly human side of her nature, by the wise exercise of her natural powers, and by trusting her human instincts as the guide of life. Her main source of inspiration was Goethe's lyric poetry, in which his philosophy of life is so beautifully and forcibly expressed. But she found much in *Faust* and *Wilhelm Meister* that accorded with her own convictions and helped her to achieve spiritual freedom. With Goethe and Schiller she believed thoroughly in the prominent part to be played by poetry in the esthetic education of the human race. "Das Dämonische", to which Goethe ascribed so much influence in the world, occupied a corresponding position in her creed. She was not a visionary, nor was she dogmatic. On the contrary, she was extremely tolerant, and possessed, with all her idealism, a rich fund of wholesome, practical common sense. She accepted the limitations of human nature, believing the acknowledgement of them one of the first conditions of progress. What deep satisfaction it might have afforded Goethe if he could have known in his last days that his "Gemeinde" was soon to receive so intelligent and appreciative a member far away across the sea.

The example of this woman, self-taught in German, shows the possibility of gaining a better knowledge of Goethe by studying him in his own writings than many students ever acquire who enjoy the benefits of university lectures and have access to the overwhelming mass of literature about him. But Margaret Fullers are rare in any country.

The fourth chapter of our book is devoted to her defense of Goethe, who was being attacked by such Americans as Emerson and Longfellow, and by such Germans as Börne and Menzel. The latter's most venomous diatribe would not have affected American sentiment if it had not been translated by a Harvard professor, who doubtless needed such a means of venting his own spleen. Margaret Fuller's answers to the hostile critics were published in the preface to her translation of Eckermann's *Conversations with Goethe* and in an article in *The Dial*. She was called upon to defend Goethe against the four charges: that he is not a Christian, not an idealist, not a democrat, and not Schiller. If Goethe had accepted without

reserve the tenets of the orthodox church he could not have found in her a willing disciple. The fact that his artistic genius discerned and portrayed the poetic aspects of reality needed no apology, so far as she was concerned, since she held this to be his inspired calling. She admitted that he was an aristocrat, considering it only natural that he should be, because of his need of repose to achieve his high purpose. Finding fault with Goethe for not being a Schiller seemed as absurd to her as quarreling with the rose for not being a lily, or with the eagle for not being a swan. She looked upon Menzel's view of Goethe as that of a Philistine, who does not enter into Canaan and read the prophet by the light of his own law. The way in which Goethe grew on her she puts in these words: "He obliges us to live and grow, that we may walk by his side; vainly we strive to leave him behind in some niche of the hall of our ancestors; a few steps onward and we find him again, of yet serenest eye and more towering mien than on his other pedestal."

In the fifth chapter of his book, which treats of Margaret Fuller's interpretation, criticism, and translation of Goethe, Dr. Braun quotes enough from her writings to give us the drift of her criticisms and convince us of the correctness of his assertion that in viewing Goethe from the historical standpoint, she was superior to Carlyle and was decades in advance of German critics, who were still laboring under the spell of Hegelian philosophy. What she says of *Faust*, *Wilhelm Meister*, *Werther*, *Tasso*, *Die Wahlverwandtschaften*, and *Iphigenie*, is well worth reading today, in spite of the increased body of knowledge that has been brought to light by the investigations and discoveries of the intervening sixty-five years. The reading of the extracts quoted creates a desire to read the whole of her criticisms, for she is remarkably felicitous in the communication of her ideas.

The first translation she made was that of *Tasso*, two years after she had begun the study of German. She failed to find a publisher for it, so that it did not appear in print till after her death. In 1839, she translated and published the first two volumes of Eckermann's *Conversations*, omitting the portions dealing with Goethe's pet hobby, the theory of colors, and condensing some of Eckermann's own remarks. Her chief purpose in undertaking the difficult task was to make Goethe better known to her fellow countrymen. She also translated a number of his smaller poems, two of which, *Eins und Alles* and *Dauer im Wechsel*, were found among her papers in the Boston Public Library and published for the first time by Braun, who shows that her rendering does not convey Goethe's meaning very accurately, nor does she reproduce the form of

the original, which leads him to doubt whether she ever intended these translations for publication. The doubt has everything in its favor.

The most regrettable thing about her literary career is the fact that she was forced by straightened circumstances to forsake her cherished plan of writing a *Life of Goethe* "from original documents", and take up the profession of teaching in order to support her family. She had collected a vast amount of material for the biography, and realized deeply the amount and character of the work involved in the preparation for it, as well as her own limitations, and yet we cannot help feeling that, with her sympathetic appreciation of Goethe and his mission, her love for the work, and her warmth and brilliancy of style, she would have written a *Life* which would have been a distinguished contribution to the Goethe literature of her time and would have exerted a strong broadening influence on American culture.

In an appendix to his treatise Braun publishes for the first time the full and correct text of Margaret Fuller's religious creed of 1842. Throughout his book he makes frequent reference to this creed, which is particularly interesting in connection with his study in that it shows Goethe's influence at so many points. The appendix is followed by a bibliography and an index.

It had long been known that Margaret Fuller was a great admirer of Goethe and was influenced somewhat by him in her religion and philosophy, and it had been pointed out that what she wrote about Goethe was among the very best of her writings and among the very best Goethe publications in any language, but it remained for Dr. Braun to discover the real and full significance of this phase of her life and work, and present it to the public of today in such a form that her desire to bring Goethe's influence to bear on American culture, and her efforts looking to that end, may add new stimulus to the forces already at work in that direction. He is to be congratulated on having been assigned such a subject for a doctor's thesis, for it has evidently made a deep impression on him, and its effect will be felt indirectly by all who come under his teaching.

The only adverse criticism to be passed on his work is that his style is at times lacking in cleverness and swing, but these faults are in a measure offset by occasional fervor and constant sincerity. It is to be hoped that the book will be widely read and that it may accomplish the laudable purpose for which it was evidently designed.

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